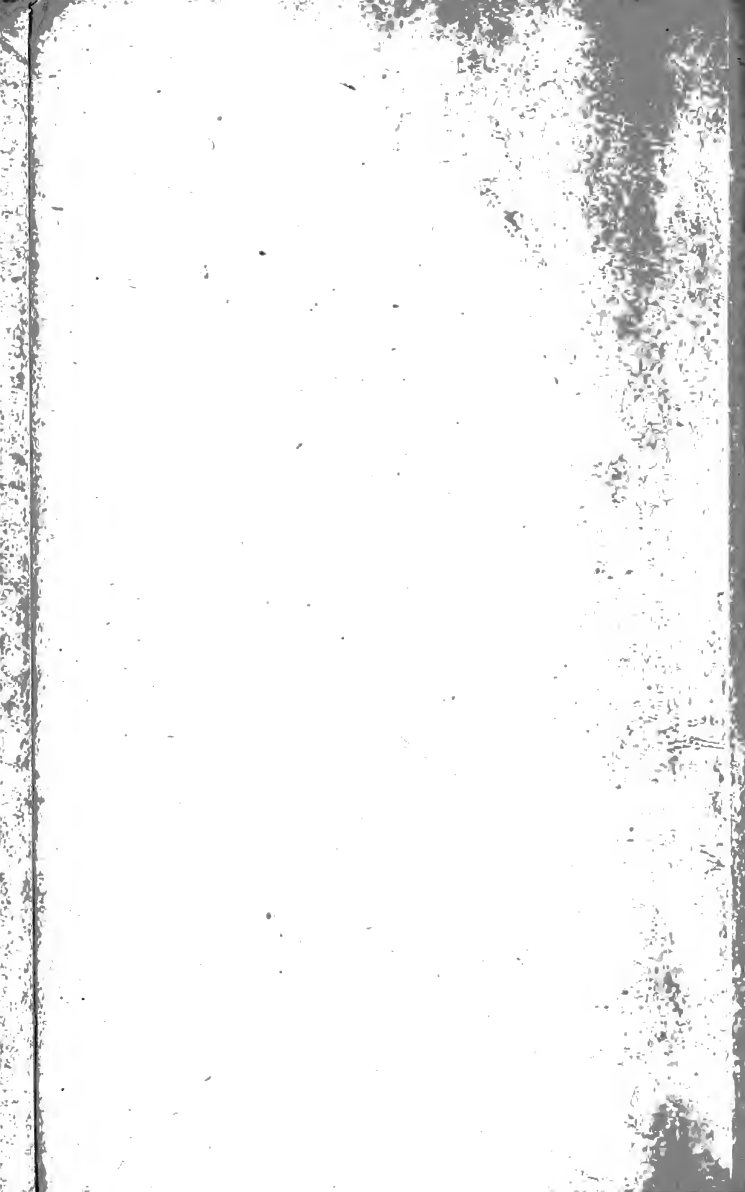


Four English Sermons

COQUEREL

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*Relig.
of heal.*

FOUR SERMONS

IN ENGLISH.

BY

Josué
(PASTEUR, ATHANASE COQUEREL,

(OF PARIS.)

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PREFACE.

THE following Sermons have been recently preached in Paris at the English service held there in the Salle St. André, 29, Cité d'Antin.

The first was preached also in Essex Street Chapel, London, on the Anniversary day of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (22nd May, 1872).

All but the last had been preached in 1871 in several churches of various denominations in the United States.

The preacher is fully aware of his imperfect command of the English language. Yet he ventures to hope that

perhaps, through the very faults of his speech, some Christian truth may flash more vividly on the mind of his reader, even as a light glimmers through the chinks of a half-broken lantern.

3, RUE BOULOGNE, PARIS,
28th June, 1872.

SERMON I.

STEPHEN THE FIRST OF REFORMERS.

A SERMON ON ACTS iv. 13, 14.

CHRISTIANITY is at once eternally the same and eternally new.

It is the same, for never shall this great commandment be either surpassed or equalled: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." Never shall a higher aim be proposed, either to human faith, or to human holiness, than this: "Be ye perfect, even

as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

But Christianity is ever new, because it can always be brought to bear upon new situations ; it can always minister to religious wants unknown before ; it can always afford a sacred theme to fresh illustrations. Therefore did Christ so often compare it either to “the leaven which a woman has hidden in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened,” or to the least of all seeds becoming greatest among herbs. Therefore all those parables about seeds springing up, wheat growing, and ripening harvests. Our religion is a tree, immovable and firmly rooted in the soil, but bearing year after year, on every living branch, new boughs, foliage, flowers, and fruit.

However, the human mind and conscience, which have charge of the Gospel in this world, are weak, changing, and erring.

We never progress very long in a straight line ; sooner or later, on the left or on the right, we drive out of the track. Then becomes urgent the necessity of a reform. A Christian reformation of the Church is a return to the fountain-head, to the Gospel, to Christ, to God. In this sense, Christianity may be called a perpetual reformation, not only of everything else in this world, but of itself ; for whenever Christianity has deviated in its progress, it must be brought back to its primitive godly type ; and having recruited its strength, renewed its spirit, it must start again, bound for fresh developments and improvements.

But no reform can ever be accomplished, or ever was, without meeting opposition. This is natural ; it must be. New spiritual wants are not felt by all on the same day. New duties are not understood and accepted at the same

moment by every man, even well-meaning and conscientious.

Therefore have all men of God who deserved so awful a name, been subject to calumny, if not to persecution, first as imprudent, then as blasphemous and sacrilegious. None more so than the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the type. When you see a man, or a number of men, condemned for their belief or teaching, and the vilest names showered upon them, stop before you join in the general and vulgar outcry. Judge before God, if these men are not walking in the very footsteps of their Master and doing his own work. If they are, even in some way quite new and strange to you, their work is nothing less than a normal development of genuine Christianity, whatever may be the anger against them of a mob or of the present rulers either in State or Church.

How long is it since those things have occurred repeatedly, since every step forward of Christianity has been attended with obloquy, with trouble; has been opposed, and, if possible, prevented, by infidels or even by believers? Is this peculiar to our modern days, so full of agitation, and confusion, and haste? Or did this melancholy state of things date from the sixteenth century and begin with Luther or with Calvin?

Certainly not. It has been so at all times. It has been so among Christians as soon as they were left alone by the Lord. We find an example of it, and a most remarkable one, in the very pages of the most sacred of all books, the New Testament. There we find the name, the teaching, the life and death of the first among Christian reformers, Stephen, who was also the first of Christian martyrs.

Let us meditate over so venerable and holy an example, and may God grant me power to make you feel more deeply than ever, that through all changes, developments, and improvements of religious life and Christian belief, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever."

Is it possible that a reform in the Church became necessary so shortly after Christ? And if necessary, why was it not done by the Apostles? Why this new name of Stephen, a Greek one, foreign to the Hebrew language and race, utterly unknown to any of the four Gospels? Who was this foreigner, this new-comer? Why was a new ministry already wanted in the new-born Church?

Because Christianity, almost immediately after its birth, possessed such a degree of life, such a power of expansion, that its frame had to be widened. Already was the winged creature ready

to burst its chrysalis and disengage itself from its narrow prison.

To understand the fact, we must remember that there were in those days amongst Jews two very different populations. The first were the Palestinian Jews, crowding around their Temple, the fervent votaries of the Law. To that class belonged the twelve Apostles and the first Christians. They all had become Christians without ceasing to be Jews. Their views, tastes, habits, education, were strictly Hebrew.

But there were also other Jews, born and bred out of Palestine, much less accustomed to speak or write Hebrew than Greek (then the universal language of the East). Their minds were more emancipated, their knowledge more extensive; their thought took a wider range; they were less foreign to the outward world than the genuine Jews who used

to boast of their exclusiveness. By these, the so-called Grecian or rather Hellenistic Jews were despised; and it was a common curse often pronounced at that time and found in the teaching of the old Rabbi: "Woe be to the father who teaches Greek to his child."

In Jerusalem, where the Palestinians were at home, and where the Hellenist Jews were attracted in large numbers by the great annual festivals and by the common faith of all Israel, quarrels were frequent between the two parties. They were not even rare, though we grieve to say so, between those of both parties who had become Christians. We read in the book of the Acts a record of murmurs arising in the small community of the Nazarenes, *the Grecians complaining of the Hebrews* and accusing them of *neglecting their poor widows in the daily ministration*. Then, as you all remember,

the twelve, unwilling *to leave the word of God and serve the tables*, called on the *whole multitude* to elect deacons who should *be appointed* over this business.

It is a striking proof of the brotherly spirit prevailing in the Church of Jerusalem in spite of this discord, that, though Palestinians were naturally more numerous, the universal suffrage gave the new office of deacons to seven *Grecians*, one of them even being a proselyte.

Eminent among the seven, and the first named, was Stephen, a man *full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*. But the seven did not limit their ministry to the serving of the tables. They preached also. Stephen soon became a leader among the saints, not only because he was full of faith and power, but because he preached not by any means a new Gospel, but the Gospel disencumbered of

all Judaical remains—the Gospel free from the trammels of Mosaic bondage.

The success of his preaching was rapid and immense. Many of the Jewish priests (a fact as remarkable in itself as easy to account for) were converted by this bold emancipator. Great was the wrath of the Pharisees and Sanhedrim. They sent contradictors to refute the powerful preacher, but he reduced them to silence and to shame—"They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." This was too much. A violent agitation arose, a storm gathered against the Church and threatened to destroy her in her infancy.

Doubt not one moment that Stephen was very generally blamed. Up to that time there had been no martyrs, no persecution since the crucifixion of Jesus. Christianity was supposed by many to be a new Jewish sect or party, like a

number of others. By conforming to the Mosaic law, the twelve and their followers even earned a good name amongst Hebrews. The Pharisees were led to consider the new school as eventually a useful ally against their rivals the Sadducees, who denied the spirit and future life. All, then, was smooth and quiet. The Church was silently and slowly extending, gaining ground little by little. Who can wonder if most Christians blamed Stephen? When the angry Jews declared him sacrilegious, his own people thought him imprudent.

The catastrophe could but be near. Stephen was caught and led to that very Temple he was accused of threatening with ultimate destruction, and before that very Sanhedrim who were scandalized at his overthrow of the Law, of which they considered themselves the keepers and the avengers.

There, suborned witnesses declared, "this man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." But if Stephen spoke thus, did he not speak the truth? Hath not this Jesus of Nazareth changed the customs delivered to the Hebrews by their legislator? Is the Temple not destroyed, though all pious Israelites believed that it must last as long as the world? Christ did not materially overthrow it; but when one of the soldiers of Titus, heedless of his general's orders, threw his torch among the cedar wood-work and burned the structure to the ground, that Temple was already an empty frame without a soul.

When a Temple is overthrown or

burned, if the worship that was its soul is alive, the Temple rises out of its ruins or its ashes. But if it remains annihilated, you may be sure the worship it belonged to was already a dead one. In my country Louis XIV. ordered all Protestant churches to be razed to the soil. But in some places our forefathers came nightly to pray on the ruins, and thought they heard their forbidden psalms sung far above their heads by invisible angels. Now, the suppressed sanctuaries have sprung up from destruction and ring every Sunday with our old and beloved songs of praise.

In this sense, the truer of the two, it was no rash Roman warrior, it was Jesus of Nazareth who overthrew Jerusalem's exclusive Temple, who stopped for ever the bloody holocausts and ceremonial worship, who built up in their stead the Church universal, and founded for ever

the worship the Father seeks—the worship in spirit and in truth.

My dear brethren, never forget this. For in the same way shall this Jesus of Nazareth overthrow any temple, any church, though Christian in name, where his spirit is not alive.

Let us all work, with all our might and faith and love, to keep our beloved and glorious Protestant Church alive and fruitful by maintaining in it the reign, the sovereignty of the spirit of Christ. No costly sacrifice, no pompous offering, can save the Church. The spirit alone can save her.

“If any man have not the spirit of Christ” (whether he have or not temple, church, law or letter, rite or dogma), “he is none of his.” Let us boldly add: if a man have the spirit of the Lord (even if he should lack everything else), he belongs to the Lord.

When Stephen, the undaunted champion of Christianity free from the Mosaic yoke, appeared before the Sanhedrim, his face was like the face of an angel, transfigured by the interior flame, by faith, hope, and love.

Then he began his glowing and powerful apology, where he entirely forgot himself, his danger, his defence, and boldly accused his hearers and his judges.

It is not for his own, but for God's cause and the cause of all his prophets persecuted by his own people, that Stephen pleads. He borrows from the Master, from Christ himself, his method of teaching. He turns against the Jews, as Jesus had done more than once, that very history of their fathers that made them so proud. He takes it up from the very first days to those of Solomon, whose Temple, better than the present one, was not worthy to contain

Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, and that Temple has been destroyed already. He makes against them a killing weapon out of every one of the facts in which they gloried. Wounded pride interrupts him by murmurs. Then he speaks out. He thunders against them the direst charge. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers. When they heard those things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth."

Here, in the midst of their rage, he is enraptured, in ecstasy. He remembers that he stands before the very tribunal

before which his Master appeared, by whom he was roughly ordered to deny himself, but to whom he answered: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Full of this sublime remembrance, and of enthusiastic love to Christ, proud and humbled at the thought that he actually stands at the same place, before the same judges, he braves their impotent wrath, he courts a martyr's death, he contemplates with the eyes of burning faith what no mortal sight ever perceived. He will see, he sees, and cries, "Behold! I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Then arises on all sides a dreadful tumult; they cry out with a loud voice, stopping their ears to his blasphemous words, and running upon him with one accord. He hath blasphemed in the

Temple, before the sacred council, face to face with the high-priest. They have all heard him ; they are all witnesses. They will all, according to the law, avenge on him the majesty of God, the glory of Moses, the sanctity of the Temple. They draw him along to the place of execution out of the city gate.

There, the wrathful prophet whose fiery words have burned them to the core, is no more the same. Ready to die, calm, free from anger, a celestial serenity on his brow, he pardons the very men he has just condemned. It is he that must die ; it is he whom they kill ; he can afford to pardon them with all his powerful and tender heart. Full of Christ, he will resemble him to the last. The death of Christ is present to his memory. He will die like his Master. To him he cries, " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ; " as Jesus, dying on the cross had

“commended his spirit to the Father’s hands.”

Then, stoned, wounded, bleeding, dying, he fell on his bruised knees and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And when he had said this he fell asleep.

Shall any one still inquire how Stephen deserved the unique glory of being inscribed first on the long bloody catalogue of Christian martyrs?

He deserved that greatest of all honours because he was, amongst the primitive Christians, the less Jewish of all, the most emancipated, the most spiritual, and the first of Reformers. And this because he was more purely Christian, more directly and solely united to Christ, more penetrated by his spirit. And therefore his teaching, his life and death, paved the way to the spiritual conquest of mankind.

What were the results of his death? They were threefold.

Its first fruits were bitter. Persecution for the first time raged against the Church that was in Jerusalem (at that time the only Church). And all who believed were scattered through Judæa and Samaria.

Indeed, those who had blamed Stephen seemed to be too well founded in their blame. He was buried only by a few proselytes (devout men) who made great lamentation over him.

The second consequence of his death was that the Grecian Jews who had been his disciples were scattered here and there, and brought the Gospel everywhere. Samaria, the Phœnician sea-ports, Cyprus, and Antioch, became the centres of new congregations. In this last and very important city a name was first given to the new religion. There and then was the word Christian invented. So, in the

case of the first of martyrs was made good the rule, since so often made to prevail, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church; and it may be said that the spot where Stephen fell was the starting-point of the conquest of the world.

Thirdly, this same martyrdom had other results, more distant, but more powerful also. You all remember who the young Pharisee was, who, while Stephen was stoned to death, kept the cloaks of his murderers. No one knows, no one can say, what deep impression this most holy and noble death left on the strong mind, the burning heart, the lively conscience of St. Paul, of Paul so much a greater man than Stephen, Paul the Apostle, not of the Grecian Jews, but of the Greeks, of the Romans, of the Gentile world, of mankind.

He became even more than all this.

He became the most indefatigable of Reformers, the most unflinching enemy of the letter and the law, the votary of the spirit. Accused more than any other amongst friends and foes of being imprudent and sacrilegious, he intrepidly continued Stephen's work. The ordinances of the Mosaic Law, the holiness of the Temple, fell before his word.

However, all his might is in Christ. "I live, saith he, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." With a most biting irony he censures, he condemns, his own disciples, when they give him a higher rank. "Was Paul," says he to the Corinthians, "was Paul crucified for you?"

And that again is not all. He goes on, even now, continuing the work of Stephen. Who, if not Paul, raised up Luther? In whose book did the great modern Reformer learn that the just shall live by faith? Who, if not Paul, every

time religious liberty is threatened, every time the letter and the law try to prevail over the spirit, who, if not Paul, sounds the alarm-bell of Christian emancipation?

I hear it at this very moment.

I hear him even now, my brethren. The conquests of Christianity, either in depth or in extent, either in our own minds and lives or among men, are not complete. More developments, more improvements, more conversions, are needed, are coming.

Your Heavenly Father has done you the great and dangerous honour to call you to life in the time of a great religious crisis with all Christian churches, and in all kinds of religion or belief.

In Christianity, the Church who declares herself immutable, shows the greatest changes. New dogmas have been promulgated. After three centuries and more, an Œcumenical Council

has assembled, and has committed the strangest of suicides by declaring the Pope alone infallible. Henceforth Councils are unnecessary, which amounts to the destruction of the last scanty, forlorn hope the Liberals of Roman Catholicism entertained of an appeal from the Pope and the Society of Jesuits to the Church in Council.

Amongst Protestants, the same debate arises under different names in different countries and denominations. It cannot but arise. The question is between the liberty of the Gospel, of Christ, of the Holy Ghost, and bondage to some petty, self-made Papacy. In France, a Synod of the Reformed Churches will soon have to judge this awful and vast law-suit. Everywhere, in all races, climes, nations, churches, the spirit moveth, "the wind bloweth where it listeth."

What is all this bringing us to?

Where does Providence lead us? No man can answer. But what is undeniable is, that to be ready for the great struggles and improvements of our time, we all must remain more than ever united to Christ, our Master and our Saviour, his followers, his imitators, his continuators.

Such was St. Paul's secret in his glorious war against Heathenism and Mosaic Law. Such was St. Stephen's secret in his short but sublime ministry and his most enviable death. Such must be our secret, our strength, our hope.

I add but one word: Christianity, to become the perpetual reform of itself and of the world, must be the reform of every Christian, the regeneration of every soul.

Let us, then, reform our lives, our hearts, after the resemblance of Christ. Let us grow to his stature. Let us breathe his spirit. Let us hope, as our

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merciful reward, let us ask, as an almighty help, for this blessing of Stephen's great successor : " All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

SERMON II.

CHRISTIANITY AND PROGRESS.

“ Verily, verily, I say unto you : He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father.”—JOHN xiv. 12.

THERE are two words, solemn and grand, that many people cannot bear, without anxiety or offence, to hear pronounced in one sentence. The first is Christianity ; the second, Improvement, Progress.

Christianity, say many pious persons, is divine, is the revealed truth, perfect in itself, given once for all by Christ, and sealed by his death on the cross. It is impersonated in him, failing in nothing,

wanting nothing. Do not mention, in connection with Christianity, anything like improvement, like progress. It would be impossible, impious, sacrilegious.

Progress, answer other thinkers, is man's noblest want, man's dignity and glory. He is born for it. He must and will improve everything in and about himself. If any form of worship, if any Church stands in his way, clogs his steps, and stops his progress, that religion or Church must and shall be swept away before him. Nothing can be more impossible, more impious, more sacrilegious, than preventing mankind from progressing, from growing stronger, wiser, and better, from soaring higher and higher. God wills it, God commands it, God has written that law of His in our inmost nature, and no prejudice, no dogma, can prevail against Him.

I answer, that both statements are true.

The only mistake is to think the one contrary to the other. I declare Religion and Progress are two aspects of one eternal fact. The law of every progress, for all time and for eternity, has been promulgated by Jesus Christ himself, when he said: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." That commandment he knew to be impossible; but he knew also that it answers alone the wants of our higher nature; that we are made to progress onwards eternally; that if nobody can ever reach the goal, we all can at any time advance towards it, and come nearer to Him whom we never shall join. Christianity is progress in its broadest and highest and most complete acceptation; and un-Christian progress is truncated, mangled, partial.

Christianity has immense conquests and developments to accomplish, either

in extent, among men over the whole world, or in depth, among the very best Christians and in their souls. Christianity is progressive in the utmost degree, not though, but because, it is divine. It bears in itself inexhaustible fruitfulness, innumerable germs of life.

One of the most astounding and most awful declarations of that capital truth is this teaching of the Lord to his disciples: "Verily, verily, I say unto you: He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father."

Let us meditate on these deeply suggestive words with devout reverence, and at the same time with a fearless resolve to search after the whole truth. And may we hear the Master say to us, as he once said to Nathanael, "Because I said these things unto thee, believest

thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these."

I.

Every word of my text must be attended to, but every one is easily explained, and must be understood in its simplest and most ordinary sense.

Christ here speaks of a force, a power, that belongs to some, but not to all. What that power is, we shall soon investigate. Let us first see to whom the promise, the offer, is made.

To "him that believeth." Belief is of itself a strength. He that hesitates is weak, is powerless. "He that wavereth," saith St. James, "is like a wave of the sea, driven with the sea and tossed."

Even if what we believe be false, the mere fact of thinking it true gives us some strength, and oftentimes a very great energy. It would be easy to quote

many and celebrated instances of this and also of the reverse : great success attending, soon or late, unflinching fidelity to some belief, either political or religious, even when unfounded, and no result at all from wavering confidence in actual truth and duty.

But if every belief, even false or bad, imparts some strength, is it not self-evident that the combined might of human faith and material truth must be immense? It is not of every kind of belief that Christ spoke. He spoke of those who "believe on him." To believe on Christ is to partake of his spirit and his life, to be, in some degree, one with him, to adhere to his person, to be, as Paul has it, "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

Now I declare that though, in the course of time, many churches, rites, dogmas, have faded and fallen, though the human

mind has turned away from them, disappointed and disgusted, it does, and will, more and more, turn to Christ, and find in him the full answer to all its wants. The more I live, the more I read the Gospel and listen to the echoes of the Master's voice, the more I feel that very far from being exhausted, his work of salvation and regeneration is more necessary and powerful than ever.

Now he teaches us that the man who "believeth on him shall do the works he did." He says not that believers will contemplate, but act. Contemplation is not enough. There are actual, practical duties to be fulfilled; there is good to be done.

He says not that believers will dogmatize. There are more pressing wants in the world, and more comprehensive tasks to accomplish, than mere systematization of truth.

He says not even that believers must love. He wishes love to be efficient, to will and act, and devote and sacrifice itself.

He says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." So must his followers work after him. Therefore St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "What availeth in Christ, is faith which worketh by love."

Here I stop to ask all believers: Is your faith working by love? Does it work by love in your own life and mind? Does it work by love amongst those who live around you?

But, answer many, how can I work? what can I do? You must, you can work; here is the answer: As Jesus Christ has done, do the same works, continue his great works. He saith: "He that believeth on me shall do the work I do, because I go unto my Father."

He left his unfinished work in the hands of those who believe on him. And here comes the very great and earnest question: Who is a believer? What is it to be a Christian? Is it enough to be born in a Christian family and church? is it to accept, in a general sense, Christ's doctrine? is it a vague adhesion to him? By no means. To be a Christian is to be a disciple, a follower of Christ, to continue his works, to do what he left undone; to be—(listen and remember, for the idea is as awful as it is certainly true)—to be a Christian is to be a *continuator* of Jesus Christ.

What his works were, you all know; he "went from place to place doing good," he comforted sufferers, he pardoned offenders, he reconciled men with each other and all with God; he preached the truth; he gave perfect examples of every virtue, and he protested against

hypocrites and oppressors, until they crucified him.

That is the work he left in our charge.

And he did not say, "Because I go unto my Father, my work is to be done by a Pope, a Council, or by priests, by synods, or by pastors and ministers. His work and his word are for all, are for laymen, are not priestly or clerical, but essentially laical. No privilege for prophets, patriarchs, or sacrificators. The same charge to all. All Christians must continue Christ.

If this is not yet clear enough, let me ask of you what you deem your life to be, what you live for?

Life has been given you to be spent in two great works ; the first being to become perfect, to labour incessantly for your own improvement and regeneration ; the second, to love, help, and serve your brethren, to make them happier and

better. If you live for self, to gratify your vanity, your sensuality, your ambition, your greed; if, instead of becoming better, you grow worse; if your evil passions gain the ascendancy, enslave your will, weaken your conscience, accustom you to their thralldom; if you neglect or oppress others; if you cause them to suffer for your faults; if you cause their eyes to shed one tear you could prevent from falling,—then your life is not Christian, you are no continuators of Christ, whatever may be the correctness, fancied or real, of your dogmatical views, the strictness of your moral principles, and your renown of morality or piety.

But if you advance in the way of religious strength, purity, and love; if you become more and more masters of your own tempers and feelings and actions; if you spend your life for the

benefit of others, giving up to them your own interests and wishes; if, in two words, you make yourselves better, and others happier, day after day, year after year,—then, but then only, is your life a Christian life; then, but then only, you are continuators of Christ. For “he that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

Thus I hope we understand now fully what the Lord meant by every believer doing his works. It remains for us to explain the much more mysterious words, “and greater works than these shall he do.”

II.

Here I must confess that the commandment seems to exceed the limits of all possibility, the bounds of human strength, to clash strangely with all humility, and even with the deep

reverence, if not with the very love, we owe him.

Who are we, to be called upon to do greater works than Jesus Christ's? And is it himself who says so? And do we read those almost shocking words in the Gospel of John? And when were they spoken? In the last night before his crucifixion, in his farewell instructions to his Apostles.

The very angels of heaven would fall back, shuddering and frightened, from such a task, and we, we sinners, we poor, unholy men, have this enormous, impossible duty forced upon us!

Yes, so it is. In one sense (and a very important one) your good works must be even greater than your Master's.

It is all-evident that they never can be greater nor equal to his, either in their principle, or their aim, or the sacrifice they involve. But they can be greater

in this : success or prosperity ; in that immediate good speed that gives so much satisfaction and encouragement.

In that respect his disciples' work was greater than his. It is true they suffered for him, they died for him. But they enjoyed the unspeakable delight to see their work blessed, their words listened to, souls gained, churches erected, Heathenism and Judaism losing ground, Christianity the conqueror of the Old World.

No one, perhaps, encountered such hardships as Paul ; and nothing is more appalling than the long catalogue he writes of his suffering of all kinds. But what a triumph he was ! He saw the Roman Empire, in Asia and in Europe, in Athens and in Rome, bow before his sovereign Gospel, and fall vanquished at his feet. Even in his captivity, even when chained to the arm of a Roman

soldier, even when led to suffer death, he must have felt deeply thankful to God, because the world had been conquered by him, and multitudes of souls brought to the obedience of the Cross.

But what victories, what conquests, had Christ reserved to himself? Where are his spiritual triumphs? Whom did he convert, or who followed him during his lifetime? The Twelve, who were so slow to understand his meaning, whose small faith, short-sighted intelligence, and stubborn hearts he so often censured. And who more? A small number of sinners and of penitent women, and an inconstant throng, many of whom, perhaps, had shouted, "Hosannah to the King, Son of David!" a few days before they cried to Pilate, "Crucify him!"

It has been truly said, that as Christianity could not be entirely fulfilled and developed while he was on earth, he

never saw, with mortal eyes, a real accomplished Christian ; he left Christianity unfinished, and his Church, not a majestic, thriving tree, but a seed under the sod.

Once only in the whole Gospel we see him not "moved with compassion toward the multitude, because they were scattered as sheep having no shepherd," but rejoicing that many believed.

This happened in Samaria, at the gate of Sychar, near that Jacob's Well given by him to his son Joseph. I have seen the spot where everything—Sychar and Gerizim, the plain and the two mountains, the town and the well—seemed to me witnesses of the great eternal truths uttered there by him. While Jews and Pharisees, with their unsufferable spiritual pride, revolted against his law of humility and love, he found the heretical Samaritans more open to the truth and eager to receive it. While the woman

with whom he had spoken at the well left him in search of her fellow-citizens, he neglected the food his disciples brought him, and answered to their offer of meat : “ My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work. Say not ye there are yet four months and then cometh harvest ? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields ; for they are white already for the harvest.” Then, throwing forward a long look of unspeakable melancholy on his own work, hardly begun, so soon to be left to others, he added : “ Herein is that saying true : One soweth and another reapeth. I sent ye to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour : others have laboured and ye are entered in their labour.”

Who had laboured there if not he ? And who was to reap where he had sown, if not his followers, his apostles, if not

John and Peter, who were to raise a church, the first of all after Jerusalem, amongst those very Samaritans? Their success, and in that sense, their work, was greater than his.

So must our work be. We are their followers as they were his. We who believe are, after them, in charge of the harvest.

We are all responsible for it. All generations must continue the work of Christ; all are answerable for their share of labour in his field, or their unprofitable inaction.

I hear often many people declaim against our times, say that we are on our decline, that everything is falling to decay. And then I think, if this be true, it is the fault of all. After the terrible lessons the present age has received from God, after all that has happened around us, we are all responsible, even more than

our forefathers, for God's work in this world.

I hear some pretend that Christianity is worn out and its day passed. But when and where was Christianity adopted and practised in all its earnestness, its strength, and liberty? Hardly has it begun to be understood and to reign. Is the world Christian? Are all Christian churches really Christian? Is one church, one sect, one congregation, thoroughly Christian? Ah! what work remains to be done!

I will not calumniate the age I live in. The greater spiritual wants are better felt. All religions, whatever they be, are agitated, all establishments and denominations shake on their basis. The spirit of God, like a powerful wind, "bloweth where it listeth." You see it not; you know neither where it goes nor whence it comes; but ye must feel it.

I say unto you as Jesus said: "Behold the fields are white already for the harvest." To reap for Christ you must be free believers. You must be believers, because, as we know, he who believes not has no power. Free believers, because faith does not deserve her own name if she is not free, if she does not spring freely from a free soil, be the offspring of sincere choice and upright will. Free, because faith wants freedom, first to be, and secondly to grow, to affirm herself, to gain adherents, to conquer opponents. Free, for the world turns away with distrust from those who seem to say whatever they say because they dare not say otherwise. Free, for the world will listen only to manly and living faith, without shackles, fiction, or insincerity.

Free believers! you indeed are, in the troubled days we see, the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world.

The world will come to you when they see the spontaneous flame, the living light of your Christian faith and of your good works.

Cry, with Jesus, to the world, "The Truth shall make you free." And they will listen to you in great numbers, and your work will then be greater even than your Master's.

And now, before I end, let me add one word more. When I say that your duty is to work the work of Christ, to make yourself better, your neighbour better and happier, I do not mean that this is your calling only for the short span of this poor life. It is the life eternal as well as it is the present life. We have the mean, miserable habit of thinking of our future life as independent from and wholly different of our actual existence. Not so Christ. Not so his Gospel. "He that believeth on the Son hath (and not

shall receive) eternal life." He has it. He has begun to develop and enjoy it. This work of faith and love shall endure and continue after death. Death can change its outward shape, not its nature ; enhance its degree of beauty and worth, not destroy its value and fruitfulness, greater and greater many times in the future than all this world has already seen of the work of Christ.

Devote yourself, perfect yourself ; such is your task for all time and for all eternity ; always nearer and nearer to God who waits for you, calls you, attracts you, and showers on you His divine light and His manifold blessings, growing, strengthening, purified, "*transformed* into His image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

SERMON III.

THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY.

“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”—MARK iv. 26-30.

ALL things are constantly moving or changing.

Mountains, the very image of whatever is huge and stable, alter, by slow degrees, their shape; and it has been ascertained that even they glide insensibly on their bases. Oceans either recede from their coast or invade it.

The largest rivers are known to have, either here or there, shifted their direction. The very stars, perpetually whirling round in their orbits, are not always the same in number; now and then a new world comes to light, or an old one, like a quenched fire, is seen no more.

To this universal rule man is no exception. He cannot deny that time and age change him, adding to or detracting from his strength; his knowledge, memory, and experience, bringing with them new wants, new tastes, new habits. But he often denies that his character is subject to the same law. It is easier to deny the possibility of change than it is to improve. Many persons declare that a man cannot reform his temper, or correct his inner nature, and that after all we remain much the same. This is a very comfortable doctrine to people who cherish their own faults and

wish to save themselves the trouble of improvement. But I can tell them that they are mistaken ; that, if they become no better, they must and do grow worse ; that if they do not resist bad influences, they obey them ; that every one who, for any length of time, has not been a gainer, is a loser.

But this is not all. As we are subject to a thousand influences, good or evil, from surrounding things or circumstances, or from other men, we are at the same time, consciously or unconsciously, whether we will or not, exercising over all around us the same power for better or for worse. Our way of life, our examples, our views, the tone of our mind, the habits of our speech, are perpetually telling upon the moral qualifications of our fellow-creatures.

There is hardly a greater force than frequent repetition. Single drops of water

falling every minute, or hour, or day, on the same spot, will in due time pierce through the hardest stone or rock, not, as the heathen poet remarked, by their strength or weight, but merely by dint of unceasing repetition.

If all this be true (and who can deny it?), there is between all of us a mutual responsibility, each of us being more or less, but in some real degree, answerable for many ; each having a part of his own in that continual mysterious underwork that raises or lowers the character of families, of friends, of associates for business or pleasure, of political parties, of whole nations, of mankind. And this unperceived working of all upon each, and each upon all, is as much a law of the spiritual world as universal gravitation is a law of the physical creation.

“The field is the world,” and in that

field we are all, day after day, sowing either good seed or tares, or both. But I tell you that you can sow nothing in the Lord's field without having to answer to Him for what He shall reap there. And when once the seed, whatever it may be, "is cast in the ground, whether the sower sleep or rise, night and day the seed must spring and grow up, you know not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

Let us, dear brethren, devoutly study these holy words. I declare I know not, from one end of the Bible to the other, either a more solemn warning and threat to evil-doers, or a promise more abundant in hope and more inspiring "to every man that worketh good."

I.

1. Our Heavenly Father, when He created us free, granted us an awful gift. Every human being has a vast power for good and a greater one for evil. To do wrong, nothing more is wanted than the giving up of our will to our passions, yielding to their sway, and letting the rein slip out of our hand. . . But to do any real good, it is necessary to have a will, to consult and obey the dictates of conscience, to make an effort, and often to struggle long and hard.

One moment's forgetfulness, one hardly voluntary impulse, and a great harm may be done, done for ever, irrevocably done. Thousands and thousands of our fellow-creatures, groaning under the heavy yoke of remorse and unavailing despair, would have gladly given anything, themselves included, for the privilege of living again

one short moment in their past lives, and undoing what they have done. But time is inexorable and never returns. Whatever poor, frail, inconsiderate man has said or done, he can never gainsay or undo. What has been done once, remains done for ever and evermore, to all eternity.

Nothing is lost; nothing remains barren and unfruitful. Every act has consequences, very often more numerous, various, and durable, than we could beforehand imagine them.

And those results of our own agency are twofold. We act upon ourselves, and we act upon others. If it is barely possible that one of our actions has no influence of any kind over other people, it is impossible that an act of any importance should be without consequence at least to ourselves. We make ourselves. Every one of you, whether he knows it

or not, is perpetually occupied in making himself better or worse, in adding something to his store, either of vice and corruption, or of morality and godliness. Not only deeds, not only words, thoughts alone suffice to make us much nobler or much viler.

This is the deep secret of human worth or depravation. Has it not often occurred to you to ask yourself, when reading the life of martyrs and heroes, or when hearing of some abominable wretch of the very basest description, human in shape only : How could a man, one of my own fellow-creatures, soar so high or sink so exceedingly low ? The answer is : None of them achieved his downfall or his rise at one stretch. They both reached by many degrees where they are. By many degrees this man became a saint, and that other man almost a demon. If you could ask them

how they have achieved their own loss or glory, they would perhaps answer as your great and good Newton modestly did, when asked how he had found out that law of the universe which all mankind had never been able to discover before him : I thought of it. Think every day of bad things, and you will become as bad as your thoughts. Who can touch pitch and not be defiled? Feed your mind on hatred, or envy, or sensuality, or greediness, and you will be ripe, sooner or later, for the harvest of sin, perhaps of crime.

There is no such thing in the world as an isolated sin. We sin because we bear evil in our inmost being. In some countries there are volcanoes, and occasionally they vomit fire, but they do not create it. The fire lies under ground, hidden far under our feet by rocks, and earth, and trees, and verdant vines, and delicate

flowers. From time to time some dreadful eruption will reveal its presence and show its destructive power. You may during the long interval have forgotten the danger, but it was lurking there all the time.

How insane those are who, knowing that they bear in their own breasts a secret, deep spring of evil, nourish and foster their own enemy ! They cast in their own field the black and hateful tares ; they have cultivated the rank weed ; it grows, whether they sleep or rise, by night and by day ; the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, and the time comes when the foul crop is ripe, ready for the sickle.

How can it be otherwise ? *Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles ? Be not deceived : God is not mocked ; for, whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

2. It is never in himself only that man casts the seed of evil, and manifold are his ways of harming others.

What dreadful power has calumny! How easily, how fast, is a false accusation launched in the world! how common is it to suggest against a brother dangerous suspicions! And when once started, how easily, how rapidly, the evil report spreads! The old Greek poet truly said that words are winged and fly away. When once they have fled, there is no calling them back; when the fire is lighted, who can stop its spread? When the tares of calumny have been sown in a man's field, whether he sleep or rise, day or night, the baneful seed springs and grows up, nobody knows how. And the hour speedily comes when a rank harvest of injury and of wrath has sprung up in all directions.

Another example of the fruitfulness of

bad thought and word is the frequency of speeches that hurt like a barbed arrow, and remain deeply sheathed in the very wound they have made. What detestable treasures of hatred, jealousy, and violence, are thus accumulated, and often end in some cruel outburst of crime, or at least of misfortune! *They who sow the wind must reap the tempest.*

And these are not yet the worst ways of hurting our brethren by sinful language. The most abominable of all is the destroyal of purity, of high feeling, of generous affections, of religious life, by profane levity, by licentiousness, or by contagion of corruption. Who knows what faults, what moral disorder, what impiety in others, he has to answer for, if he has been, even through mere thoughtlessness, a sower of evil seed? Woe to you who wither in other souls the seeds of noble feelings and generous deeds,

who rail at piety and devotedness ! *Woe to that man by whom the offence comes ! Whoso shall offend one of those little ones,* it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Let no one answer : Are we the keepers of our brothers ? For you all know who first asked that question. Yes, you are, we all are, we all must be the keepers of our brothers. And, if we are not, the day will come when those who, by our instrumentality or even our heedlessness, have been lost, will rise up in judgment with us, and condemn us, saying : It is you who did cast in our soul the seeds of corruption. Woe and shame and curse upon ye, our masters in evil ; appear with us before the judgment-seat of the Most High, and bear your heavy share of all our sins !

He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the

flesh reap corruption. So writes the great Apostle. Let us now turn away from from those dreadful images to better and brighter hopes. The same St. Paul writes also : *He that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.*

II.

1. If I am thoroughly convinced of the fruitfulness of evil, I am a thousand times more certain of the eternal, sublime, infinite fruitfulness of good.

Nothing is lost, said I ; and now I add especially : Nothing good can ever be lost. Nothing, said I, remains barren ; and now I add : Nothing really good can remain unproductive.

There is between right and wrong no equality ; there exists no parity between good and evil. At the root of everything that is bad lurks some false notion ; while the basis of all good is truth.

Now, whatever is false is nothing but a misconception of the human mind, without reality, without being. Truth is by itself. What is true, exists and lasts, and shall last evermore. Thus evil, being founded on error, on what has no existence, carries with it the principle of its own annihilation. But good can never pass away; it is eternal, like truth, which is the child of God, and can never die.

God, moreover, is not indifferent to good or evil. He is not impartial between right and wrong. He is partial to everything noble, and moral, and pure. Though, to our childish impatience, our fears and ambition, He often seems to wait too long, His day must come. He loves, He approves, He blesses, He wills everything good. He watches over the good seed growing unseen under the sod; He sends over the young green blade His

rains and the warmth of His sun. And when the good harvest is ripe, He comes, as the reaper, with the sickle in his hand.

2. If this be so, they are wrong who despair of a just cause, whatever it may be ; who cease to hope in truth, in mankind, in God. A great thinker truly said, that the greatest of all human errors is despair.

I readily confess that there are dark periods in life, long days of seeming immobility, when the world appears to stand still, every improvement to be impossible ; there are other times, even more dreary and dreadful, when, instead of advancing, everything appears to fall back, to grow worse ; every improvement that had been made seems to be lost ; every hope of progress to be forlorn ; nothing happy seems to be possible.

Now I declare, even in those seasons

of obscurity and despair, there is actually plenty of good seed hidden underground and growing secretly; the Creator's own work is steadily going on in the dark, and while men of little faith deem that all is lost, the earth *brings forth fruit of herself*. Look at a field after it has been sown; the eye of ignorance can see no promise on its surface, and many a long week passes by without any sign of life appearing above ground. But the believing husbandman waits, confident and happy. He knows the grain he has sown is in good keeping. He smiles if a little child asks why he wastes good corn by throwing it in the earth. He knows that an unseen but unerring process is preparing his bread for the year to come. And if an unknowing hand should open the sod, pluck out the swollen, disfigured and discoloured corn, half opened for the bursting out of the future plant, he

will smile again at this appearance of destruction, and he will remember what the Master said: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

Husbandmen of God's spiritual field, preachers of the Gospel, reformers of nations, friends of improvement and enlightenment, you must never despair, even if the field looks barren, and the good seed dying or dead. It must appear so for a time to bring forth much fruit.

3. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, in spite of all sinister predictions, in spite of human lack of faith and of heart, the world improves; mankind walks forward; higher up is the word.

You were right, Hebrew prophets of old, when amongst the direst calamities, Israel being conquered and disseminated

in the land of bondage, on the banks of Babel's rivers, you prophesied that the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

You were right, apostles of Christ, poor and unknown, weak and persecuted, when you repeated the glorious words, *All power is given unto him in heaven and on earth.*

You are right, you all who hope against hope. Never was the good cause wholly lost. Sooner would the sun change his course, and run from west to east, than truth, justice, and holiness be lost. Never renounce, even for a single moment, a true belief, a generous hope, an unselfish ambition. Never forget that your Master said, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

Persevere, sowing all around you noble examples, high principles, love to man and love to God. And if you do not see

the harvest, remember that it grows *you know not how*. Even if darkness and peril, even if a flood of fire and destruction falls upon you, and threatens to sweep away your whole work, fear nothing; go on; lose neither heart nor hope.

To sow, to work, to wait, is yours. Success and harvest belong only to God. After man's toil comes his free blessing, in his own time. *Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the increase.*

I address now every one of you, or rather only one, if there is one among you who believes himself least of all, the weakest, the less confident, the most desponding of all. To that man I say: My brother, if you will work for truth, if you wish to cast good seed in the soil, you shall be great and strong, for God will be with you, will work, will fight, with you and for you.

You can do something for your country and for mankind. Are you poor and alone, you can give the noblest examples of manly energy, of self-reliance, moral dignity, without any shade of baseness or of envy.

Humble mother of a family, when you are asked to work for truth and the moral welfare of mankind, do not answer that you cannot even try to grapple with spiritual problems and the wants of humanity, because you are obliged to restrain your activity to your own homely task, bringing up your sons and daughters. I declare to you that there is no work more needful, more sacred on earth, than this business of raising to your country, to our common race, to God, worthy sons, and daughters who must become such mothers as you are.

Young men, you have life before you ;

many and manifold may be the opportunities given you to be useful to your brothers. Be prepared for any duty, and in the mean time observe this golden rule of the Apostle James, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Young girls, show in your whole life what devotedness, what empire over herself, what purity, what moral elevation, a Christian young woman can have. There are veiled lamps that diffuse through a whole house the purest light, hurting no eyes, charming and mild to all.

These tasks are obscure, answer some people; little fruit can be expected from such seed. Never mind the humbleness of a task if it is yours. Never let a soldier quit his post because he deems it

unimportant. Who knows to what degree his personal responsibility may be enlarged? Husbandmen, till your field; God gave it in charge to you. Soldiers, remain at your post, and, if required, die there; it is all important, it is sacred to you, because it is your post. There are no such things extant as little or insignificant duties. All duty is great, is sacred, is divine. All duty is the will of God; my duty, your duty, is the command of God to you or to me.

All of you, Christians, work on, work on. Lose not a day; lose not an hour. There is a difference between sowing the good seed of God in His spiritual field, and sowing wheat in the ground. We all know in what season the corn shall be ripe, and we prepare our sickle accordingly. But no man knows in what season, what day or hour, his task must be complete; when the master of the field will

call him away from it; when the sickle of death will reap the crops he raised. To die were nothing, if we had not to answer for our past life, if we had not to appear before the throne laden with the sheaf of wheat and tares we have reaped.

Unprofitable servants, thriftless husbandmen, what have we done with the good seed that had been entrusted to our disobedient hands?

Brethren, let us hasten to repent, to amend, to ask for the help of our God, to devote all the energies of our soul, all the time of our life, to His service, and the welfare of our brothers, His children.

Not for us, O Lord, but for the glory of thy name and the reign of thy love, bless the field, and the seed, and the toil, even the small labour of thy servants. Bless the growing harvest of truth and good.

And if thy Name is hallowed, if thy
kingdom comes, if thy will is done, then
. . . . *thou art the Lord!* do with
us, thy poor unworthy servants, what
seemeth good to Thee !

SERMON IV.

VIOLENCE AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”—MATT. xi. 12.

“WHEREUNTO, asked Jesus, shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows and saying: We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say: He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating

and drinking, and they say: Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners: but wisdom is justified of her children."

This contrast, so forcibly unfolded by our Lord himself, is well known and often quoted. We all remember how the Baptist lived in the desert, harsh and terrible in his upbraiding of sin, ascetic in his life; while Jesus lived in the world, mild and meek in his words and actions, appearing with his disciples among men even at marriage-feasts or social gatherings, and often drawing after him the hungry crowds.

The fact has even been not seldom exaggerated. We all have a secret tendency to substitute to the power of godliness its mere form. The Jesus of convents and nuns is a poor monkish type, utterly destitute of manliness, without the virtue of holy indignation,

without any energy of speech, perfectly unsufferable for his effeminate and dreamy emptiness. Believers in such a Christ, utterly at variance with the real Son of Man, forget his glorious praise of his precursor : " Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than he." They forget his fearful condemnation of Chorazin and Capernaum. They forget the scourge of small cords with which he drove the vendors out of the Temple. They forget his saying : " I come not to send peace, but a sword ; " and again, " I am come to send fire on the earth ; and what will I, if it be already kindled ? " They forget that the Gospel teaches love not only to man but to God, who is Holiness ; and this love is war against all sin, hypocrisy, and oppression. It is not enough for us to be interested by our religion, or moved, calmed, comforted, enraptured. We must

be by our religion transformed to the resemblance of our Master. We also must be violent against ourselves, against the evil in ourselves, against our own selfishness. As there is in all evil a mischievous violence, there must be an effective power in good.

The rude image of my text is that of a town, or rather citadel, stormed by assailants. This is the sense in which the word is used by Greek writers, especially by a military commander of high repute both as a skilful warrior and a classical author—Xenophon.

What city does the Lord mean? Is it, as many inadvertently answer, heaven itself? By no means. It is the kingdom of heaven on earth; it is the reign of God in our own hearts and our own lives.

Thus the scope of the Saviour's speech is at the same time an approval and a

warning. Seeing a mighty rush of souls, labouring and heavy-laden, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, assailing the gates of his new-born Church, he approves and encourages their eager zeal, and warns all others to follow them with the same pious vehemence. In other words, the eternal lesson we must all derive from his words is this: Without courage nobody is or can be, nobody remains or can remain, a Christian.

God help me to make this great moral truth obvious to every one of you.

I.

1. The first kind of courage no Christian, and most especially no Protestant, must lack, is the courage of Inquiry. He must know as much and as exactly as possible what the truth is, and what is his duty. For this all-important inquiry he can depend upon no one. He is per-

sonally responsible for it, responsible to God himself.

Is there any danger of this inquiry being too earnest and pushed on too far? None, as long as it is done in a spirit of reverence and love. None, as long as he who studies has no other aim than searching after the truth to believe it, and after his duty to perform it.

Be not anxious if some time during this great work the clouds seem to gather and hide the sun. They cannot carry him away in their sable folds. His light will pierce anon through all their thickest darkness, and when a gust of wind scatters them far and wide apart he will shine forth in his full glory.

But even if there remain some mist before our mental eye, even if our spirit harbour some unseen and unpremeditated error, the Almighty and All-wise Father will mercifully pardon our involuntary

error. The work every one of us builds on the one foundation, Christ, may be "wood, hay, or stubble," even while we deem it to be "gold, silver, and precious stones;" but when the fire shall try "of what sort" is the work of a man, even if his work be burnt, "that man himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

2. After this unflinching boldness to look hard for truth and duty, we want no less the courage to be true to them when found—the courage of Consistency. He who knows his duty best is answerable for more than those who know it not. Every privilege confers a new degree of responsibility.

It is common for Roman Catholics to accuse Protestants of some coldness, some remissness in this respect. It has been common for the most orthodox Protestants to tax their liberal brethren of the same fault. I know this scandal seems lately to

be rather diminishing, if not dying away ; I know all churches, denominations, or parties, are vying with each other to show that their places of worship are better attended, their children better educated, their poor, their sick, their sufferers of all kinds, better cared for. God be praised for this blessed sort of emulation, the only competition that ought to exist among Christians !

However, the mere fact that such a reproof has been uttered, and is not yet wholly forgotten, shows that we Protestants who most justly believe that we live in the full and free light of the Gospel, we Liberal Christians who consider ourselves bound to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," we must remember that there is no powerful light without warmth ; that our lives are the test by which outsiders judge our faith ; and that we owe to

the truth, to God our Father, to our Master and Saviour Jesus Christ, not a mere nominal reverence, but a most active service; that all the powers of our soul and our limbs belong to them; that we must be unflinching labourers in our Father's field, unwearied builders of his holy temple, undaunted soldiers in his war against evil.

3. What I said a moment ago about the duty of serious and persevering investigation is not true only of our knowledge of religion, of morals, of the Gospel, and of God. It is no less true of our knowledge of ourselves. Here is needed a special kind of rather rare fortitude.

Many avoid carefully the trouble and humiliation of knowing exactly what their own moral situation really is. They avow that they are sinners like all others, certainly not better than they ought to

be; but they have very little desire to know more precisely what moral and religious ground they have to stand upon.

Many others obey another system of self-delusion. They exaggerate their own faults. They call themselves with proud humility the first of sinners. Why so? Because they read in St. Paul's Epistles that the most powerful of the Apostles, he who conquered to the obedience of Christ the heathenish Empire of Rome, could never pardon himself for having been an enemy to Christ, a blasphemer against the Gospel, and a bloody persecutor of the first disciples. In the anguish of his self-condemnation, of his burning repentance, in his enthusiastic thankfulness to God's mercy, he once wrote, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

But this word, which is nothing in

Paul but the very natural and becoming outburst of genuine humility, is no better than disguised pride in those who, after all, are but sinners in the poor, common, vulgar acceptation of the world.

No hypocritical aggravation of our own guilt; no fanciful exaggeration of our importance! We are not, you are not, chief of sinners; we are entitled to no precedence, even in evil; we have no right to pride ourselves either for our sins, they are mean; or for our repentance, it is weak.

Cease any attempt to compare yourself to fellow-sinners; renounce any pretension to rank among the first even there. Compare yourself only to what you could be and ought to be. Compare your past and present thoughts and doings to what they ought to have been, and cry to God in all simplicity, as the publican did, "Be merciful to me, a sinner!"

4. And now the same rule holds good about the sad truths we discover when studying our own soul, as about all other truth. After the duty of inquiry, the duty of consistency. And for a being who feels himself a sinner, the name for consistency is real repentance, is genuine amendment.

Too many among us, after committing again a sin they loathe and hate, but have been too weak to abstain from, feel wounded in their self-love and self-esteem; and too often they mistake spite for repentance. Because they are ashamed of themselves, disgusted with their own base folly, and anxious about the ultimate results of their wicked and growing habits, they believe they repent. They are not aware that their hatred for evil is nothing more than the shame of wounded pride; neither the love nor the fear of God, neither the love for holiness

and moral beauty, nor the horror for evil, are their real motive ; there is no redeeming power, no chastening force, no healing virtue, in such selfish and earthly feelings ; and as long as serious repentance is not awakened, no purifying flame rises up from among the embers of their half-extinguished conscience.

Why, do you ask, have I so often repented without finding strength enough to be a better man ? Why have all my prayers, resolves, tears, been powerless ? What is the use of repentance if nothing durable and strong springs from it ? I answer : You did not repent deeply and hard enough ; you deceived yourselves ; your repentance was but skin-deep ; it was not the surgeon's deep and bloody stab absolutely necessary to relieve and cure ; you were too tender and fearful for yourselves.

We must struggle with all our might

and pray with all our heart for real repentance, for a strong sense of our faults. We must know and feel that we are answerable to God for the past, and even more so for the present and future. We must not rest satisfied with a poor attempt at repentance. We must suffer. We must be violent against ourselves, violent in our good resolves, violent in our change of life. It is here, it is in this respect, even more than in any other, that "the kingdom of heaven must suffer violence," and that "the violent" take it, and take it only, "by storm."

5. And now we come to the touchstone of moral life, to the courage that may be emphatically called Christian courage. I mean the energy of Self-sacrifice.

Here is the decisive difference between the man who belongs and the man who belongs not to the kingdom of heaven.

The first lives for self. The second knows how to give up everything for his brethren and for God. Here rises before us the sovereign and most excellent of Christian virtues, Charity. "Though I have all faith so that I should remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

Self-sacrifice is the great example of the whole life of Christ. Self-sacrifice is the great example of his death. Self-sacrifice is the only means of communion with the Founder of the kingdom, and with God, our Father and our King.

I know that you may cry like the Apostle, "This is a hard saying: who can bear it?" I confess I feel on my own account that it is hard, at the very moment I say it. But I cannot help

saying the whole truth, unwelcome though it be. We have too much forbearance for ourselves; we take good care, even when generously disposed towards others, that all our charity shall not hurt our interests. We take great care, when bringing our offering on the altar of God, not to give Him anything we cannot well spare. We have another God we love better, we serve better, for whom we keep our choice gifts, our more precious offerings; we secretly worship an idol, cherished and honoured beyond anything in heaven, though we would be ashamed to call it by its mean, contemptible name—Self. And that is the great, the only reason why we cannot take the heavenly kingdom by storm. We decline to be violent against selfishness. We take great care never to hurt ourselves even in our charities; we do not allow either our zeal for God or

our love for man to interfere with our personal comfort or ease. We practise no violence to ourselves; we do not forget our own interest. We lack Christian violence to ourselves. And therefore I say, give enough to feel it, to suffer for it, to hurt yourselves in your own pleasures or comforts or needs, and so only you can be really charitable.

6. Last of all, even if this blessed violence against self-love be born in us, last of all, I wish you still another sort of courage: I wish you courage to look forward, to look in your own future, to think of what is soon to become of you.

I do not mean so much that you ought to remember death, and be ready for it, than the higher and better truth that you must remember life, everlasting life, and be ready for that. Death to a believing, enlightened Christian is not death, but birth—a new birth to a better life, the

entrance not to a dark cave, as your great Milton said, but to a realm of light, of pure and more resplendent life. Death is promotion to a higher rank. Death is our soul unfolding, like the newly-winged insect, its unknown powers, and soaring higher with a new joy and a fresh delight. But for this promotion you must be ripe. For this wider range of sight, and thought, and activity, you must be prepared. Of this nearer view of God, you must not be too unworthy. You must not have made yourself unfit for it by a base, sensuous, or greedy or bitter and selfish life. You must have unfolded in your soul all the forces God gave you for generous impulse, for purification and enlightenment, for high thought and godly life, for noble sacrifice and aspiring aim. You must stand on the highest round of Jacob's ladder you could possibly reach in this world, and then death will give you an angel's feet

and angel's wings to climb, with light step and a heavenly lifting strength, to higher eminence.

To reach this glorious climax you must cut away with Christian violence all obstacles from your own weakness, passions, and sinful tastes, habits which cause men's souls to cling to the vile earth, to stick to the low ground on which animal life creeps.

And this is not all. Not only is the kingdom of heaven nigh, not only are we driven faster and faster nearer the glorious and narrow gates, but we have in this short and shortening life a tremendous amount of good and great work to do. There are suffering multitudes to relieve, ignorant throngs to instruct, oppressors and hypocrites to war with, oppressed and deluded souls to make free, loving hearts to repay with responding love. Be not like the Nico-

demus of Gospel history, who loved, revered, and consulted the Master by night, spoke for him in subdued, half-trembling words, and only declared for him when he was dead, nailed on an infamous cross, and when it was too late for any other work of love and fidelity but funeral rites and costly aromates in a winding-sheet. Hasten to love those God gave you; hasten to make them as happy as you can. You do not know for how long they are lent you, or you to them. You only must know that they shall be taken away from you, or you from them, and that you have not a day, an hour, a moment, to lose, to make amends for past negligence, or even for worse than that. Then, either in life or death, you will have done your duty. But with lukewarm loves, struggles, or improvements, you never can do your work. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.

One word more. There have been perhaps in the history of the world times of peace, or at least of truce, when a sort of stagnant repose pervaded everything and everybody.

These our present days are nothing of the kind. Either between nations, or in every nation, among men of different ranks, classes, or callings, there are mighty and threatening causes of trouble and danger. God evidently prepares the world for new duties and unknown experiences. You can no more stop His sovereign will than you can stop the movement of our planet by clinging to the soil. Awful obligations are laid upon us by the Almighty's will. Any hope to escape either in my cruelly ransacked country, or in any other, from the immense task of our time, is futile and childish. We must work, and pray, and struggle, and devote ourselves. We must sacrifice ourselves to the welfare of

our brethren, to the redressing of many grievances, to the spreading of Gospel truth more deeply in the souls that have received it, and more widely among the millions that have not known it yet.

And for all that great heavenly work, an unsparing courage is the absolute condition.

Without it, nothing can be done. Before it, all obstacles shall fall and must be overcome ; and this will be found true in our days as in the time of the return of the Jews after the Babylonian exile. God once more will speak, and to that monstrous mass of sin and darkness that stands in His way He will say :

“ Who art thou, O great mountain ? before Zerubbabel, thou shalt become a plain.”







